

Festival of Ramkatha - 12th - 15th March, 2008

Ramayan Ballad of mewat Jogis from Rajasthan (Lanka Chadai)

The Muslim jogi community in the Mewat region of eastern Rajasthan has a long history of a music tradition. Singing and performing on various occasions such as birth, marriage, other festivities and death is inherently interwoven in the life of these "wandering minstrels". Celebrating primarily the vira (heroic) and shringara (erotic) rasa, the stories and legends of Mahabharata (pandoo ka kada), Shiva Vivaha, Bharathari, Heer-Ranjha, Ramayana (lanka chadai) and many such popular legends all form a part of their repertoire. Steeped in Hindu folklore and mythology, their music cuts across and transcends all religious boundaries.

Solely surviving on patronage from the ruling families, the wealthy landlords, the jogis owe allegiance to the same patron or the jajman (as he is locally known) and his family for generations. Besides evoking the right mood of the occasion, the songs also serve as a means for praising the valour, heroism, and indomitable courage of the patrons' ancestors. Interestingly, the literature of the songs was provided by the jajman themselves and it was then the responsibility of the musicians to compose and embellish the verses and the poetry using appropriate music and rhythm patterns. The performers are generously remunerated with cattle and food.

Lanka chadai, sung in the form of doha-dhani, is believed to have been composed about more than 360 years ago by Nizaamat Mev. Many episodes in the narrative make this Ramayana distinct in its own right.

While the narrative commences with a qawwali which is especially sung if the jajmans are Muslims, the entire narrative is interspersed with bhajans (devotional songs) the instruments mainly used are jogia sarangi, bhapang , dholak. One of the recent additions is the harmonium. The performance space is usually the chaupaal.

In the absence of any written text, this tradition has been coming down to every generation orally as a result of which many local elements get incorporated in the narrative. The communion between nature and man comes through very beautifully in the narrative which is also a quintessential feature of the folk tales. As the legends become a reflection of the socio-cultural practices of the region, the characters also begin to appear on the same plane as the mortals.